

MOUNT LIMBO WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

1. THE STUDY AREA - 23,702 acres

The Mount Limbo WSA (NV-020-201) is located in western Pershing County, about 50 miles north of Wadsworth, Nevada, and about a 1 1/2 hour drive from Reno. The WSA includes 23,702 acres of public land and surrounds 81 acres of private land. The southern boundary is a combination of roads and a powerline; the northern boundary uses section lines and the Limbo Pass Road to keep the WSA away from private lands and the western boundary is the Sage Hen Spring Road.

The Mount Limbo WSA straddles the southern tip of the Selenite Mountains, a typical mountain of the Basin and Range Geomorphic Province. The elevation of the study area ranges from 3,880 feet to 8,237 feet. Three distinct landforms are found within the WSA: that portion of the ridge crest that is granitic; that portion of the crest that is basaltic; and the fringing desert piedmont. The granitic portion of the ridge crest is in the northern three-fourths of the WSA. It is a single granitic ridgeline of steep angular, landforms with a distinctly serrated appearance and three major peaks: Kumiva Peak, Mount Limbo and Purgatory Peak. This section has shallow drainage systems running perpendicular to the main ridge crest and includes granitic rock outcrops and granitic boulder slopes. Two aspen groves and four meadow areas are along the drainages in the vicinity of Kumiva Peak.

The basaltic section of the Selenite Mountains is distinctly more rounded and darker from the granitic ridgeline to the north and is dominated by a west facing escarpment. This area is nearly flat in the east with slopes exceeding 100% in the west. This part of the WSA is minimally eroded with shallow drainage systems on the west side and is separated from the granitic ridge crest by a distinct southwest-northeast drainage southeast of Mount Limbo. The fringing desert piedmont is flat to gently sloping with shallow parallel drainages separated by low ridges.

2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE

The recommendation for this WSA is to designate 12,750 acres as wilderness (including 50 acres outside the WSA) and to release 11,002 acres for uses other than wilderness .

The portion recommended for wilderness includes a ridge crest presently free of human imprints, a primarily natural landscape and outstanding opportunities for a diverse number of recreation activities. Portions of the area recommended for wilderness are extremely rugged. Granite outcrops, most of which are situated near the ridgeline, break up what could be a monotonous line. Two large aspen groves offer shelter and solitude to the visitor. If this area is designated as wilderness it would offer a mountainous desert terrain with intriguing canyons to the National Wilderness Preservation System.

The recommendation for the Mount Limbo WSA emphasizes maintaining access to a portion of the WSA for mineral exploration and extraction and for recreation purposes. Large portions of the WSA have potential for the occurrence of a diverse group of mineral resources including hardrock locatable minerals, and saleable mineral and geothermal possibilities. The recommendation permits exploration and development of these energy and mineral resources.

The moderate potential for occurrence of a diversity of mineral resources in the different parts of the WSA is sufficient evidence to conclude that in the future this area could produce quantities of important mineral resources. The development of mineral and energy resources in this WSA will cause the loss of wilderness values. Such actions would probably affect 4,500 acres or more of the WSA. It was felt that the partial wilderness recommendation would incorporate the area with the highest wilderness values while excluding those portions with the highest mineral values.

Another major reason for this recommendation was the amount of ORV use the WSA receives, especially by upland game hunters. By placing the boundary of that portion recommended for wilderness at the base of the mountain range and eliminating the easily accessible flats, it was felt that access to hunting areas would still be obtainable.

There are 50 acres outside of the study area that are also being recommended for wilderness. They were included to make a more manageable boundary.

It is projected that even after mineral exploration and development and ORV use much of the area will retain wilderness characteristics.

3. WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS

A. Naturalness: The WSA is primarily natural with few improvements in the Selenite Range. The study area encompasses one grazing allotment with two developed springs, one reservoir, one corral, and 14 ways (16.9 miles).

While there are mining areas within the WSA, adjacent to the WSA, near the west boundary are two small mining areas with minor surface disturbance which can be seen from within the WSA. Also, several roads, including a state highway, can be seen from inside the study area. A powerline and service road form a portion of the southwestern boundary.

B. Solitude: Opportunities for solitude are considered outstanding in the WSA as a whole. In the granitic ridge crest section, most areas have low shrubs that provide minimal vegetative screening. However, a few scattered Utah juniper trees and two aspen stands provide good local vegetative screening. Topographic screening is generally fair to poor due to the lack of dissected drainage systems and the presence of steep slopes. Screening is locally outstanding where rock outcrops are common.

In the basaltic portion of the ridge crest, low shrubs give minimal vegetative screening and the lack of dissected drainage systems provides fair topographic screening. Low shrubs provide minimal vegetative screening in the desert piedmont. In this section, topographic screening is also poor, but it can be locally fair in some small drainages. The WSA is large enough to provide solitude, except at the narrow southern tip. Localized and seasonal ranching activities outside the WSA have a minimal impact.

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation: The WSA's size and topography offers outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation activities such as day-hiking, camping, backpacking, hunting, horse-packing, rock climbing and scrambling and nature study. Attractions that bring people to this area are the granitic ridge crests, views of surrounding desert landforms and granitic rock outcrops with the scattered Utah juniper and some of the best mountain climbing in the Winnemucca District. These features are concentrated in the portion recommended suitable.

Another recreational aspect is the fact that the WSA is on the route of the proposed National Desert Scenic Trail. For those people who enjoy viewing wild horses, the study area is in the Selenite Wild Horse and Burro Herd Use Area.

D. Special Features: There are no special features in this WSA.

4. MANAGEABILITY

That portion of the study area being recommended for wilderness designation can be managed as wilderness. The only manageability concern is a 41 acre parcel of private land located near the northeast

boundary. There would also be management concerns dealing with the 1,000 acres of ORV accessible land and the 3.9 miles of ways. The remainder of the WSA can also be managed as wilderness although there are 40 acres of private land present. There would be management concerns with the 13 miles of ways present.

5. ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCE VALUES

The following conclusions were reached ; 4,950 acres of land are rated as having moderate metallic mineral potential (tungsten, uranium, molybdenum), 19,300 acres are rated as having moderate nonmetallic mineral potential (feldspar and beryl), and 6,400 acres are rated as having moderate geothermal potential. There are no mining claims or geothermal or oil and gas leases in the WSA. There is no present production of any mineral or geothermal resources in the study area.

As a result of a survey by the U.S. Geological Survey, it was concluded that approximately 1,940 acres of the recommended area had moderate metallic mineral potential (gold and silver). Elsewhere, it was considered to be low as is the geothermal potential. The geologic formation is unfavorable for the accumulation of oil and gas resources.

In summary, quantities of various minerals are unknown, but the potential for occurrence is moderate in portions of the WSA.

6. SUMMARY OF WAS-SPECIFIC COMMENTS

During the initial and intensive inventory stages (1978-1980), many of the 18 comments discussed characteristics of the area (e.g., intrusions, resources, wilderness qualities) or suggested boundary changes. Reasons given for supporting wilderness study area status were these: opportunities for solitude, naturalness and special features. Reasons given for opposing wilderness study area status were the following: other resource values, roads, intrusions and lack of outstanding opportunities for solitude. These comments addressed the entire 33,280 acres of the original study area. About 10,000 acres have since been released from wilderness consideration.

During the 90-day comment period on the Draft Wilderness Environmental Impact Statement, three formal public meetings were held in Nevada (Gerlach on November 1, Winnemucca on November 3 and Reno on November 8, 1983). Of the seven oral comments received, one person supported more wilderness than the proposed action while six people supported the EIS (12,750 acres recommended for wilderness). Forty-six of the fifty-six written comments received also agreed with the d EIS while four people supported more wilderness and six people supported less. The following items were mentioned in the comments: lack of solitude and recreation, private lands, human imprints, mineral resources and the need for vehicle access. Other people discussed the need to save from development the naturalness, springs, wildlife and scenery as well as recreational opportunities and convenience because of the proximity to Reno.

Pershing County wants to preserve all public lands within the county's boundaries as multiple use areas. In a letter to the BLM the Governor of the State of Nevada stated that Mt. Limbo should not become wilderness due to the mineral potential and the removal of access for hunters. In a later letter he said that the State would not protest the recommendation. The U.S. Air Force said it supported wilderness designation as long as it did not interfere with military flights. It said it will work with the BLM if military flights create problems in some areas.

No comments were received on the final EIS.